

The Tricontinental Conference and After

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In his closing speech to the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana during the first half of January, Fidel Castro launched a fierce attack on the Guatemalan guerrilla movement, "MR-13," led by Antonio Yon Sosa and on the Argentine journalist Adolfo Gilly who has probably done more than anyone else to acquaint the world with the character and achievements of MR-13. Since Gilly's most comprehensive reportage on the Guatemalan guerrillas appeared in this magazine (in the issues of April and May of last year), and since Gilly is also a frequent and valued contributor to *Monthly Review*, we are devoting a large part of this issue to printing the relevant part of Castro's speech and Gilly's reply, the latter taking the form of a general critique of the Conference itself. In this editorial we attempt to clarify MR's position on some of the principal issues in this politically very important controversy.

On Trotskyism

One aspect of the Castro speech is ugly and perhaps ominous. His attack on MR-13 rests entirely on two propositions: first, that it is "infiltrated" by Trotskyites and has a Trotskyist program; and second, that Trotskyites are agents of imperialism. If the second proposition were true, the first would of course be a devastating indictment of MR-13. But the accusation has no foundation whatever, as anyone who has seriously studied the history of the communist movement since the October Revolution must know. It was precisely this accusation which provided the rationalization for the Soviet purge trials of the 1930's. If anything has been proved --and not least by the Soviet government itself-- it is that the trials were a shameless frame-up; and no evidence has ever been produced to restore credibility to the accusation. To revive it now is a sure sign of either ignorance or malice. For our part, we prefer to believe that in this matter Fidel himself is ignorant and that the malice comes from advisers who never abandoned the attitudes and methods which underlay the trials. If so, it behooves Fidel to take time out for serious study of the history of the movement to which he is, for reasons which do him no discredit, a latecomer (he could do worse than begin with Isaac Deutscher's brilliant three-volume study of Trotsky which is much more than a personal biography). In the meantime, one can only hope that Fidel's bad example is not going to lead to a revival of the kind of witch-hunting which so bedeviled and stultified the world revolutionary movement in the Stalin era.

As to the rest of the indictment of MR-13, that there are Trotskyites in the movement and that it has a Trotskyist program, we neither know nor care whether or to what extent it is true. In our opinion, the only kind of revolution that has any chance of succeeding in Latin America today is a socialist revolution. We were, we believe, among the first to say that the Cuban Revolution would be forced to advance rapidly to socialism --or be overthrown. After visiting South America in 1963 we stated our opinion in these pages that there is no such thing as feudalism in Latin America and that it therefore makes no sense to talk about a bourgeois revolution. When the Guatemalan guerrillas, conducting an armed struggle against the bloody dictatorship imposed on their country by the CIA and United Fruit, adopted a program reflecting similar, if not identical, ideas, we hailed the event as an historic breakthrough. Nothing that has happened since, including Fidel Castro's name-calling attack, has caused us to change our minds. If Fidel

wants to argue rationally about the validity of MR-13's program, well and good; let him do so. He will find no lack of serious revolutionaries to weigh his views with all the respect and attention due the leader of the Cuban Revolution. But he should not deceive himself that he can sway any but cowards and sycophants by mere denunciations.

One more point in this connection: Whatever its role in Guatemala, Trotskyism is certainly not a large or important political force in Latin America as a whole. But if Fidel Castro and the Latin American Communist Parties duck the question of socialism, and still more if they attack as Trotskyites all those who openly struggle for a specifically socialist revolution, then the prospects for Latin American Trotskyism will be vastly improved. For the necessity, and indeed the inevitability, of socialist revolution, not in some vague future but as the next historical stage in Latin America is rooted in the underdeveloped, imperialist-enforced reality of that region. This is not to say that socialist revolution is coming in Latin America tomorrow or next year: great historical changes do not happen that way. It is simply to say that no other kind of revolution is possible in Latin America and that sooner or later all serious revolutionaries are going to have to come to terms with that fact.

The Achievement of the Conference

Gilly's evaluation of the Tricontinental Conference is wholly negative --a Conference "without glory and without program," he calls it. This seems to us to result from a lack of proper perspective.

It was a great, indeed a "glorious" achievement to bring together delegations representing revolutionary and anti-imperialist organizations in scores of Asian, African, and Latin American countries. New and lasting contacts and channels of communication were opened up. Views and experiences were exchanged, perhaps more in private than in public sessions. Above all, the Conference aroused and gave dramatic expression to an unprecedented sense of revolutionary militancy and international solidarity among the victims of imperialism. The right and duty to meet imperialist violence, exemplified for all to see in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic, by revolutionary counter-violence was the central theme of the entire Conference. As Marcel Niedergang reported from Havana in *Le Monde* of January 20th, "revolutionary enthusiasm easily carried the day, and the Soviets who arrived with resolutions of prudence were obliged to intone the same refrain."

The Havana Conference, in other words, sounded the death knell of all those narcotic illusions of peaceful coexistence and peaceful transition which lie at the very heart of modern revisionism; it brought closer the day when in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, "man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind." Can it really be said that this was not a great achievement?

Do not misunderstand us. We do not maintain that the policies for which these illusions provide the rationalization are themselves dead. In the report already cited, Marcel Niedergang stated, with evident agreement, that "certain observers" at the Conference considered the concessions made by the Soviet delegation "purely verbal and formal." But is it really of no importance that they felt it necessary to make such concessions? Has not the Havana Conference thrown down a profound challenge to the Soviet leadership, and indeed to the whole Soviet people? And is it too much to hope that mounting pressures of this kind will eventually force a change of policy and perhaps even a change of leadership in the Soviet Union?

The Position of Fidel Castro

Gilly asserts without qualification that Castro, as the ally of the Soviet leadership, has now espoused the line and policy of peaceful coexistence. In our view this is an oversimplification and distortion of a much more complex reality. To convince oneself of this, one need only read the major speeches by the Cubans at the Conference—the opening speech of President Dorticós, that of Osmany Cienfuegos—, the secretary of the new tricontinental organization set up by the Conference, and the closing speech of Fidel. We quote from the last:

The world is big and the imperialists are everywhere. And for Cuban revolutionaries the battlefield against imperialism covers the whole globe! (Prolonged applause)

Without boasting and without immodesty, that is the way we Cuban revolutionaries understand our internationalist duty; that is the way our people understand their duty, because they realize that the enemy is one and the same; the same who attacks our coasts and our land, the same who attacks others. And because of that we state and proclaim that revolutionary movements in any corner of the globe can count on Cuban combatants. (Prolonged applause) ...

If Yankee imperialists take the liberty of bombing wherever they wish and of sending their mercenary troops to suppress the revolutionary movement in any part of the world, revolutionary peoples feel they have the right to help, even with their physical presence (Applause) the peoples who fight against the Yankee imperialists.

And thus if each one helps according to his capacity, if each one helps according to his possibilities, the Yankee imperialists will be defeated. And if there is any place where they are doomed to suffer a crushing defeat, that place is Southeast Asia. (Applause)

Because there it is possible to establish a correlation of forces incomparably superior to those of the Yankee imperialists.

That is why we have not the slightest doubt that they will be defeated, that they will be crushed by the people themselves of that area, and if they increase their forces and those of their reactionary allies, they will be defeated not only by the forces of the peoples of that area, but by the forces of the socialist camp and of the other peoples. (Applause) That is why the Yankee imperialists launch their hypocritical peace offensive in order to create confusion and deception. And that is why the peoples of Vietnam have correctly stated that peace, true peace, can only be achieved when the Yankee imperialists cease attacking, when the Yankee imperialists no longer occupy the territory or part of the territory of Vietnam and when the Yankee imperialists withdraw their mercenary troops and dismantle their military bases in the territory of Vietnam....

And if we were in a similar situation, I am completely sure that we would say exactly the same. (Applause) We would refuse to negotiate under bombardment, we would refuse to negotiate while under occupation....

In Latin America there should not be just one, or two, or three peoples struggling alone against imperialism. The correlation of the forces of the imperialists on this Continent, the proximity of its metropolitan territory, the zeal with which they will try to defend their dominions in this part of the world, require a common and simultaneous struggle. (Applause) If the imperialists have to face not just the Dominican people alone, or the Peruvian people alone; if they must also fight --at the same time as in each of these countries-- against other oppressed peoples, such as those of Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay,

Ecuador, Argentina (Applause) and other peoples of Central America; if the struggle is carried out on a broad scale, if each one of these peoples, if each one of the revolutionaries of this Continent fulfills his duty... then the hour of liberation of this Continent will be nearer.

It would be simply absurd to assert that this is nothing but "purely verbal and formal" rhetoric designed to cover up secret support for the line of peaceful coexistence. Rather it comes from the heart of the real Fidel Castro who is as much a revolutionary and a fighter today as he ever was. It is also true, however, that by attacking the Chinese and MR-13 Castro has taken a position on the Soviet side of the great division in the world communist movement. There is a real contradiction here: on the one hand Fidel is passionately advocating the very policies of armed national liberation struggle which the Soviets would like to abandon in the interests of a deal with the United States; on the other hand he joins the Soviets in attacking not only a small movement which is putting these policies into practice but also China, the socialist giant which is standing firm against United States blackmail and by so doing is creating a situation in which the national liberation struggles of Asia, Africa, and Latin America have a chance to develop and mature. The trouble with Gilly is that he fails to recognize the reality of this contradiction and hence of course is precluded from understanding its implications.

Out of contradictions come movement and change and so it will be here, for it is unlikely that Fidel will be able to continue indefinitely lining up with the Russians against the Chinese and at the same time throwing Cuba's weight behind the broadening and deepening of the national liberation struggles of the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. [1] As pressures and tensions mount --primarily those emanating from the developing national liberation struggles themselves-- he will be increasingly forced to choose, not only in words but also in deeds.

The situation is much too obscure and complicated to permit predictions at this stage, but it seems worthwhile to stress two things which will certainly play an important part in determining the outcome. The first is the fate of Che Guevara, the second the condition of the Cuban economy.

In his final speech to the Conference, Castro said that "some day mankind will learn all the facts. That will be the day when the villains will see that comrade Guevara was not murdered; each of his steps will be fully known." Let us hope so, and let us hope that the day comes soon. For Fidel should be under no illusions that only imperialists and their agents are interested in Che's fate. More than anyone else; even more than Fidel himself, Che has come to symbolize all that is best, all that is pure, all that is beloved in the Cuban Revolution, a great historic event which belongs not only to seven million Cubans but to all the people of the Americas and indeed to all mankind. If, as some charge, anything untoward has happened or should happen to Che, those responsible (and that would necessarily include all who knew and kept silent) will be forever disgraced. A Cuban regime guilty of such a crime would lose its moral authority and either would be replaced or would degenerate into a police state. In the latter case, of course, the worst bureaucratic elements would rise to the top and do whatever was demanded of them by their more powerful counterparts abroad.

On the other hand, if the official Cuban story about Che turns out to be correct, if he reappears as a revolutionary fighter and theorist elsewhere, and if he retains his close ties to Fidel and his other former comrades in the Sierra Maestra, then the bonds linking the Cuban and world revolutions will be strengthened and the chances of a favorable evolution inside Cuba will be immeasurably improved. Is Fidel Castro aware of the real issues at stake in the Guevara affair?

And does he realize that every day's delay in clearing up the mystery brings anxiety and doubt to honest revolutionaries everywhere and joy to their enemies?

The relevance of the condition of the Cuban economy to Fidel's future evolution is perhaps less obvious but probably not less important. The first impulse of the revolutionary government after it came to power was to diversify agriculture and drastically reduce Cuba's dependence on sugar. In this way, it was thought, Cuba could end the anomalous, and indeed scandalous, situation in which one of the world's potentially richest agricultural areas fell far short of feeding its own inhabitants. But the problems of diversifying agriculture turned out to be more difficult than had been anticipated, and the advantages of expanding sugar production for seemingly assured markets in the socialist countries appeared to be so attractive that the early enthusiasm for diversification died out and Cuba returned to a policy of heavy dependence on a single crop. It now appears that this may have been a serious mistake which could have grievous consequences for Cuba's future.

The real problem is not whether in abstract theory the socialist countries should or should not foster a high degree of international division of labor: the question is whether in the world as it actually exists --with all its conflicts and uncertainties and potential disasters-- any particular socialist country can afford the risk of excessive dependence on others. Cuba's recent experience in having its rice supply drastically cut by the Chinese decision to buy less sugar and sell less rice to Cuba in 1966 than in 1965 certainly suggests a negative answer. In saying this we mean to imply no criticism of the Chinese action. The reasons they gave the Cubans for their decision with respect to rice are valid and justified, and we think the Cubans should have accepted them as such instead of launching, as Castro did in his speech of February 5th, a vulgar and unbridled attack on the Chinese. Here are the Chinese reasons as quoted by Fidel himself: "(a) The need to create a reserve in case of any attack by the U.S. imperialists. (b) The aid they have to give Vietnam. (c) A deficit in the production of other grains which forces them to import from the capitalist area and hence to use some rice in order to obtain foreign exchange for that purpose." [2] At the Tricontinental Conference Fidel talked a lot about the duty of all revolutionaries to help Vietnam and carry on the struggle against imperialism. Does he now presume to tell the Chinese, who are doing most of the helping and a large part of the struggling, that all that comes after the duty to supply Cuba with the amount of rice it asks for?

But the point we wish to emphasize here concerns not the specifics of the Cuban-Chinese rice trade but the general situation in which Cuba finds itself. Cuba's dependence on China is, after all, much less than its dependence on the Soviet Union. Under present circumstances, Cuba's vulnerability to shifts in Soviet policy, no matter what their motives or justification, or simply to being cut off from the Soviet Union, which could easily happen as imperialism's war of intervention in Latin America spreads and intensifies --this vulnerability is extreme and mortally dangerous.

The conclusion seems obvious: If Fidel wants Cuba to be in a position to follow a relatively independent course --to continue, in Marcel Niedergang's words, to play "a resolutely Cuban game"-- in the explosively tense and stormy period which lies ahead, he had better return as quickly as possible to a policy of agricultural diversification and self-sufficiency in foodstuffs.

The struggle for a Socialist Orientation

The Tricontinental Conference laid to rest once and for all the illusion of peaceful coexistence between imperialism and its victims. This was a great historic achievement. But --and here we are in full agreement with Gilly--it is not enough. It is not enough for the peoples of Asia, Africa,

and Latin America to know that they must expel the imperialists from their lands by force of arms, or even to understand that by acting all together they can achieve this goal despite the imperialists' enormous technical superiority. They must also have a clear idea of what they are going to put in the place of the miserable underdeveloped capitalist societies which the departing imperialists will leave behind. And here we are completely convinced that the only viable answer is socialism.

There is no such thing as a progressive capitalist society in the period of world revolution and the general crisis of capitalism.

There is no such thing as a bourgeois class which has an interest, as a class, in fighting imperialism.

Coalitions between revolutionaries and supposedly progressive bourgeois classes are bound to result in stultification at best and disaster at worst (the horrible slaughter in Indonesia, until recently a showpiece of anti-imperialist coalition politics, should drive this lesson indelibly into the consciousness of every revolutionary).

Only a workers' and peasants' state, disposing over society's basic productive apparatus and prepared to plan and act in the interests of the victims of four centuries of exploitation and underdevelopment, can possibly clean out the Augean stables of imperialist-backed capitalism and lay the foundations of a better future.

These are the truths which must become as self-evident in the last third of the 20th century as were the truths proclaimed in our own Declaration of Independence in the last third of the 18th century. An unremitting struggle to that end must be undertaken within all the revolutionary and anti-imperialist organizations of the world, and not least within the new organization of solidarity of the Asian, African, and Latin American peoples established by the Havana Conference.

A second Tricontinental Conference is scheduled to be held in Cairo in 1968. If it merely repeats the slogans and resolutions of the Havana Conference --anti-imperialism, armed struggle, unity- it will indeed be a Conference "without glory and without program." The time has now come to take a giant step forward, to go beyond Havana, to proclaim socialism as the necessary and indispensable condition of real national liberation. That must be the object and goal for Cairo.

In the meantime, one final point: nothing we have said implies the isolation of the socialist --that is, the workers' and peasants'--movement from progressive elements of the bourgeoisie. The prospects of success in this connection have never been as bright as they are now. But that does not mean that alliances with bourgeois classes or sub-classes (national bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, etc.) are either rational or feasible. To think so is simply to betray a woeful ignorance of contemporary reality. What is needed is an understanding that what Marx and Engels said in the *Manifesto*, perhaps in partial explanation of their own uncompromising revolutionary position, holds true today in the underdeveloped countries to an unparalleled degree. Every revolutionary should take these words to heart:

Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the

bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular a portion of the bourgeois ideologists who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.

These people are abandoning their own class, and for good and sufficient reason --because their class has become the enemy of humanity. The object of the proletariat, using that term in its broadest and now most relevant meaning, must be to maximize the number of such converts, not to deceive itself into believing that pacts can be made with the enemy itself.

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[1] That Fidel's support for these struggles was not confined to public utterances is confirmed by the correspondent of *Le Monde*. "It was really behind closed doors... that the discussions between Fidel Castro... and the Latin American delegations took place. They occurred in a feverish atmosphere and uninterruptedly from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. 'We didn't even dare ask for a sandwich,' said some of the Latin Americans unaccustomed to this pace; and Fidel certainly lived up to his nickname of 'horse.' During this session there were shouts, quarrels, focusing of issues, self criticisms, and a discourse by Fidel Castro which all delegates agreed was 'remarkable.' 'Without this long meeting of Latin Americans' the delegates further said, 'the Tricontinental would have left us with a feeling of dissatisfaction.' It seems that this long 'synthetic report' by Fidel Castro included the following themes: the victory of the Cuban Revolution was not an historical accident. 'What we have succeeded in doing in Cuba you can do yourselves. Our conditions of struggle were not all that favorable. To take only one example, before the fall of Batista, Havana University was largely nonpolitical. Today, on the contrary, the universities in Latin America are active arenas of progressivism.' Second point: it is clear today that 'imperialism is on guard' and that 'the United States will never accept the loss of Latin America.' Hence, repeating one of the phrases of his Saturday speech, 'sooner or later the peoples are going to have to take up arms to liberate themselves.' A new 'lesson': 'Unity is an essential condition for success.' It is indispensable to 'surmount the divergencies, the rivalries, and the conflicts of tendencies' which weaken the 'revolutionary front.' It is no less indispensable to 'coordinate the struggle' and to 'study very seriously the objective and subjective conditions of this struggle in the different countries.'" Calling this a "resolutely Cuban game," *Le Monde's* correspondent permitted himself to wonder what will be the real reaction to it of the Soviets.

[2] *Granma*, English edition, February 6. Castro's speech is also published in full in *Peking Review* of February 28th.